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ABSTRACT

This study investigated why so many Texas women obtained mid-management certification but remained unemployed in administrative positions, comparing results to data from other studies. A total of 92 women who held administrative certificates in the 1996-97 school year but did not move into administration completed the "Women With Administrative Credentials" survey, which asked about: demographics; career history; number of attempts to obtain administrative jobs; reasons for not applying; willingness to relocate; and type of encouragement or discouragement they received for advancing their careers. Respondents noted personal reasons for not receiving administrative positions. Results indicated typical respondents were in their mid 40s to late 50s, married, with no children at home. Only eight women currently held administrative positions. More than one-third had previously held administrative positions and had relinquished them. Less than one-half had applied for administrative positions in the past 5 years. Two-thirds were unwilling to relocate to receive administrative jobs. In all studies, women experienced strong internal barriers to moving into administration (e.g., family issues and lack of interest). There were many external barriers, including politics, the "good old boy" system, and sexual discrimination. (Contains 17 references.) (SM)

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Women in Texas Who Are Certified But Not Employed As Administrators

Melinda DeFelice and Gwen Schroth

Ann Richards, Ann Armstrong, Kay Bailey Hutchinson, Sarah Weddington, and a host of others have set high standards for women of Texas who aspire to positions of leadership. In Texas' educational arena, many women have followed suit. The eight women nominated for Superintendent of the Year by Texas Association School Administrators since 1990 and the many from local school districts recognized for their outstanding administrative abilities, their accomplishments, and contributions to improved students achievement are examples.

The list of hard working, committed Texas women who have become educational leaders is long. Yet the list of Texas women who have earned the right to leadership positions by gaining the appropriate certification but who are not employed as school administrators is almost as lengthy. In 1996-1997, the State Board of Educator Certification (SBEC) reported that 40% of the women certified at that time were not employed in administrative positions (DeFelice, 1999). Given the large number of female role models available and the outstanding accomplishments of these women, why do so many women in Texas obtain their mid-management certification but remain unemployed in administrative positions? The results of the study reported here shed some light on that question.

Background

Many female educators in Texas have earned recognition for their efforts as leaders, credit they much deserve. Yet the total number of female administrators continues to remain disproportionate to the total number of women in public education
(Brown & Burt, 1990; Criswell & Betz, 1995). Over 66% of all public school teachers are female (Criswell, 1994) but only 20% of administrative positions are held by women (Waddell, 1994), although the number of females in all administrative positions is increasing (Montenegro, 1993). One possible explanation for this continued discrepancy is that women have yet to fully conquer the numerous internal and external barriers that block their entrance into administrative levels of education.

Internal barriers are those that relate to how women perceive themselves, so the assumption is that women can exercise some measure of control over them. Criswell and Betz (1995) suggest that three of the major internal barriers are lack of aspiration to becoming administrators, failure to receive credentials and apply for those jobs, and personal and family constraints. External barriers, on the other hand, are those over which women have little or no control. Sex-role stereotyping, discriminatory hiring and promotion practices, lack of support systems which include role models, mentors, and networks, and the demands of family and home life fall in this category (Shakeshaft, Gilligan, & Pierce, 1984). Minority women have been found to experience even more pronounced external barriers than do other

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women. For example, Hispanic women endure cultural and racial jokes (Marcano, 1997) and struggle with strong expectations to remain in the role of wife and mother rather than to explore careers outside the home (Peery, 1997).

Research shows that barriers that existed twenty years ago continue to hinder women from moving into administration. In 1977, Krchniak conducted a study of 242 female educators in Illinois who held administrative positions. He found that 61% did not move into administration because they simply were not interested, and 78% were not willing to relocate to obtain the position because of family obligations, their husband's job, and the salary schedule. Of particular note here is that lack of interest, unwillingness to move, and family constraints, their major reasons for not moving into administration, all tend to be labeled internal barriers.

A more recent study by Grady (1992) of women in North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas who held administrative credentials but were not employed as administrators also pointed to an unwillingness on the part of these women to pursue administrative positions. Grady's initial survey of 196 women showed that 65% had not applied for an administrative position in the past five years. Forty-five of these women were subsequently surveyed. Sixty-eight percent of these reported that they liked their current teaching positions, while 32% said they simply lacked interest in administrative work. Twenty-two said they were unwilling to relocate to obtain the administration position. As in the 1977 study, these women reported strong internal barriers to moving into administration.

Studies of administrators' career paths show distinct differences between men and women in administration, factors which have some impact on women's decisions to move into administration. Women in administrative positions tend to be white, in their mid-to-late 40's and 50's, and are married (Anatole, 1997; Obermeyer, 1996; Shakeshaft, 1989). They frequently come from rural areas and are often firstborn or only children. Women enter education with teaching as their end goal and move into administrative positions after an average of 15 years in the classroom (Watwood, 1995). Men, on the other hand, typically enter into education with administration as their goal, moving from the position of teacher, to assistant principal, to principal, to assistant superintendent and finally to the superintendency. Their term in the classroom averages only five years.

Women in Texas: Certified but Not in Administration

The purpose of the study reported here was to determine why some Texas women receive their administrative credentials but do not take the next step to obtain jobs in administration. The researcher was also concerned whether or not a similarity existed between Texas women to those in other parts of the country and whether the barriers women experience have changed in the past twenty years. Ninety-two women in Texas who held administrative certificates in the 1996-1997 school year but who did not move into administration completed the Women With Administrative Credentials survey. The survey was developed by Grady (1992) and modified for this research. The questions included demographic variables, a career history, number of attempts to obtain administrative jobs, and reasons for not applying. Their willingness to relocate was also determined as was the amount and type of encouragement or discouragement they received for advancing their careers.

Additionally, these women commented on their personal reasons for not receiving administrative positions. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. Frequency distributions of respondents' personal and professional characteristics were compiled to provide a composite picture of the respondents. Frequency distributions for all variables on the survey were obtained.

Findings

Based on the responses to the demographic data on the survey, the typical woman with administrative credentials who is not in administration in Texas is in her mid 40's to late 50's and married, with no children living at home. She has a master's degree and is either a classroom teacher or counselor.

Of the women surveyed

- only eight currently hold administrative positions
- more than one-third had previously held administrative positions and had relinquished those positions
- less than one-half had applied for administrative positions in the past five years
- two-thirds were unwilling to relocate to receive administrative jobs.

These women's unwillingness to relocate and failure to apply for positions in the last five years is similar to the women in Grady's study. When asked why they had not applied for administrative positions, these women's responses are also consistent with those of the women in Grady's study in 1992, as well as those in Krchniak's study twenty years ago. One-third responded that they were happy in their current position; twenty-one stated they were simply not interested in becoming an administrator. Said one, "In the past several years, I have observed numerous administrators (male and female) who are over-worked, stressed-out, and unhappy! Who needs it? I love what I do and wouldn't deal with the discipline problems and the demands on my time (like they do) for anything. The increase in pay is not worth it."

Internal Barriers

In all three studies, the women experienced strong internal barriers to moving into administration. When commenting on their reasons for not being in administration, these women's personal comments were particularly poignant. They often felt that family issues took priority over personal desires. One of the women who had previously been an administrator but had moved back to the classroom said, "I really enjoyed being an administrator and hope to be one again in the future. I had to look at my career and my family and make a decision. I chose my family. So many of the women administrators I attend meetings with were divorced. I didn't want that to happen to me. When my children are older, I will pursue administration again." Another whose husband was also an administrator said, "It is difficult for spouses to both hold administrative positions, especially in rural areas ... when we relocate, it is difficult to always find an administrative position for me--thus, it is less complicated, career-wise, to be a classroom teacher."

One of the many women who reported a lack of interest in becoming an administrator found satisfaction in her teaching, saying, "For the last several years, being a resource teacher has been a joy and less stressful for me than when (I was) a

regular ed self-contained elementary teacher. I must be honest, I've not gone out of my way to search for an administrative position. I've not joined organizations or found a mentor to help me."

External Barriers

The women in this study reported a variety of external barriers to their career intentions. Politics and the "good old boy" system were frequently cited. One said that a board member told her, "...no one from my family will go into any administrative position while I am here." Another stated, "Many times everyone knows who is getting the job before it's posted. I keep applying for any job that appears." Still another said, "My predecessor was a male...was named assistant superintendent within three months...It took me several years (5) just to reach the salary level that he started with." Another simply said, "It's not what you know--it's who you know." A woman who was retired sounded bitter, "In areas where there is no shortage, the state should require hiring certified personnel. If not, they should reimburse those of us who wasted our college years seeking certification. They have made a mockery of our credentials."

Lack of support from colleagues, mentors, or administrators was another major external obstacle for these women. They needed somebody to say, "You can do it." One said, "Administrators get no support from the main office. Men still get those positions before women." Another reported, "Our previous superintendent told me that school administrators should only be male. Women should remain teachers; they do better wiping snotty noses." When asked if they had received support for moving into administration from their college or university, one woman said that a college professor had actively discouraged her from obtaining her doctorate, "I was told (a) because you are a woman you won't be able to get a job, (b) you will end up getting a divorce because you will be more educated than your husband." The lack of support reported by these women is significant, particularly in light of a study of successful female superintendents in Texas by Schroth, Pankake and Funk (1999) in which support and encouragement was found to be one key to women's success. Early in their careers, all had had colleagues, usually a superintendent or principal, who encouraged them to move from the classroom into administration.

Another external barrier commented on by the women in this study was sexual discrimination. One said, "Women who reach principal in our district must be very career-minded and very obedient. People who ask pointed questions or behave in non-traditional ways do not get promoted." Another respondent said, "I feel Anglo female administrative applicants have definite disadvantages in Texas. The educational field of administration is difficult for Anglo women because the administrative positions were mainly filled by Anglo males for so many years that with new minority requirements by the courts, Anglos are the lowest group hired and Anglo females are extremely low on the list."

Other external barriers were race, age, and lack of experience. About experience and sexual discrimination one said, "They wanted a man; I didn't have experience; the school wanted someone from outside the district; the interview was only for show. The school board had already asked someone to be principal."

Conclusions About Women in Texas

While this study may provide pointers for women aspiring to be administrators in Texas and for those who train them, the most important conclusions may be those that cannot be drawn from the study.

1. We cannot conclude that women who work toward administrative certification experience regional differences. The women in this study were in the South; Grady's women were in the Midwest; Krchniak's were farther North. Yet the results were the same. No matter where they lived, a considerable number of the women who were certified did not obtain administrative positions because they simply did not want to do so.
2. We cannot conclude that things have changed a great deal in the last 20 years. Krchniak's study was conducted in 1977; this study covered the 1996-1997 school year with amazingly similar results.
3. We cannot conclude that once women obtain administrative positions they will stay
in those jobs. More than one-third of these women had once been administrators but had left those jobs, most often to return to the classroom and frequently because of family constraints.
4. We cannot conclude that barriers for women are simply internal and that women must only look within themselves to change their chances for obtaining administrative positions in education. These women reported barriers that ranged from not wanting to be an administrator (internal) to being actively and painfully discouraged from seeking those positions (external).
5. We cannot conclude that women rush in to support and encourage one another when one of their own seeks to move into administration. Although surrounded by female colleagues (the majority of their fellow classroom teachers and a few administrators are, after all, female), far too many of these women did not receive any encouragement in their quest for advancement.

We can only speculate on any deeper issues behind these women's failure to become administrators after investing a great amount of time and money in obtaining the necessary credentials. Schroth, Pankake, and Funk (1999) found that women who aspire to be in administration must be risk-takers, energetic, committed, passionate, and on the cutting edge. They have to want the job to obtain it and have to have a passion for the work to be successful once they get it. The women in the study described here faced numerous barriers, both internal and external--barriers which they did not overcome. They may not have had enough passion and zeal to become administrators or they may have had that energy when they first committed to graduate studies in administration but lost it when the support they needed failed to be there. It is also plausible that these women became aware at some point that their real contributions to America's children came from everyday, one-on-one interaction in the classroom. On the other hand, they may have simply turned to the work in which they felt safe, the classroom, when rejected by the system. Then again, a new trend may be emerging as educators more critically evaluate their jobs against personal gains and losses. Superintendents (the majority of whom are male) across the country are beginning to move out of the office in record numbers, weary of the cross-fires, politics, and stress (Bjork, 1999). If

women are following suit, future studies will confirm it. Whatever their reasons, the women in this study did invest a great deal in obtaining their certification and, when all was said and done, did not end up in administrative positions. Whose gain and whose loss this was,only they can tell.

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